

The THOREAU SOCIETY BULLETIN

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HENRY STEPHENS SALT



G.B.S. ON THOREAU

We think it particularly appropriate to be able to include in this issue of the bulletin dedicated to Henry S. Salt a letter from his old friend George Bernard Shaw. Mr. Shaw wrote this letter in reply to a letter from your secretary.

HENRY S. SALT: A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION
by John Davies

The interest of the Thoreau Society in Henry Salt rests of course mainly in the fact that he wrote a biography of Thoreau, a biography, it may be added, that is still regarded by many as the best account of Thoreau considered as the man who had somewhat to say to his fellows on the important question of whether their lives need be as desperate as they are.

It is not difficult to see why Salt should have been so profoundly attracted to Thoreau's writings as to take up the task of publishing the life of an author then so little known and read in England.

The fact is that the two men showed marked similarities in character, outlook and aim, and oddly enough in the means available to them for the carrying out of that aim. Salt, like Thoreau, having graduated at a university, took up school teaching, and when apparently well-set for a successful academic life, comfortably protected from the rude outside world, finding himself in disagreement with the educational system, with characteristic refusal to compromise, resigned his mastership at Eton, and settled with his wife in a small country cottage in Surrey, there to follow his literary and political bent, and from then on to the end of his life to live in quite humble circumstances as regards outward conditions.

Mentally and intellectually, however, and here also the resemblance to Thoreau will be noted, Salt enjoyed the company and friendship of many of the most notable writers and thinkers of his day, including Shaw, Edward Carpenter and W.H. Hudson, and, as secretary for many years of the Humanitarian League, he met, and had the friendly support of Russell Wallace, Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, G.K. Chesterton and many other writers and thinkers.

More than anything else, Salt was a man of letters, and from leaving Eton at the age of 33, he deliberately set about the business of authorship, achieving, as his many publications prove, considerable skill in lucid expression.

Besides the life of Thoreau, his writings include an excellent biography of Shelley—"Poet and Pioneer," lives of Richard Jeffries, James Thomson (B.V.), the writer of "City of Dreadful Night;" DeQuincey and others. "Seventy Years among Savages" sounds as if it might be a treatise on anthropology, but, as "The Times" critic wrote, "The savages, gentle reader, are you and I." The book is virtually an autobiography written after he had reached seventy years of age. Other works are translations from Lucretius and of Virgil's "Aeneid;" "Memories

I am not a Thoreau specialist, and in fact have never read any of his works, though I heard much of them from Henry Salt and from William Archer (who called his cottage Walden).

But I have repeated often his anticipation of Scott Haldane's insistence on ^{our} the infinite power of adaptation to any sort of diet. Far from claiming that vegetarianism was the only key to health, he said "I could live on board nails!"

G. Bernard Shaw
8/5/1949

of Bygone Eton;" "Animal Rights;" "The Logic of Vegetarianism," and, written at nearly the end of his life, "The Creed of Kinship." This last may be said to sum up Salt's matured and considered views, indeed, an address which was read at his funeral service, and that he had written for that purpose contains the following: "And when I say that I shall die as I have lived, rationalist, socialist, pacifist and humanitarian, I must make my meaning clear. I wholly disbelieve in the present established religion; but I have a very firm religious faith of my own--a Creed of Kinship I call it --a belief that in years yet to come there will be a recognition of the brotherhood between man and man, nation and nation, human and sub-human, which will transform a state of semi-savagery as we have it, into one of civilisation."

There can be little doubt that Salt's literary reputation suffered from his having felt himself compelled to devote himself to a few particular causes such as Socialism and Humanitarianism, but that was the urge he felt and it was not in his nature to compromise. Thoreau says, "No way of thinking or doing, however ancient can be trusted without proof," and Salt couldn't help challenging a number of venerable ways of thinking and doing with which he did not see eye to eye.

No note on Salt would be complete without an emphasis on his sly humour, a never-failing source of delight to his visitors. Once when we called on him when he was about 85, he related how, earlier that day he had had the annual visit from the representative of the commercial concern by whom his annuity was paid, adding, "The nice young man tried to conceal his disappointment at finding me still alive." In his last few years, he made frequent reference to his having outstayed his time, and having become a burden to all his friends, and once playfully suggested that one of us should arrange for an euthanasia, adding regrettfully, "But of course nothing kills the vitality of a salt." Again, when discussing the justification for his title "Seventy Years among Savages," he said, "But I suppose we have reason to be thankful that they have given up cannibalism."

Salt never tired of discussing Thoreau and trying to get the essential meaning of his writings, and it is an instance of his unfailing modesty that he would ask for, and give his whole attention to opinion on points on which he was clearly more competent to judge than his friend.

Henry Stephens Salt was born in India in 1851, the son of a Colonel of Artillery. Brought at an early age to England, he went to Eton and later to Cambridge, where he gained a first class in the classical tripos of 1875 and won a gold medal for Greek epigram. That he was quite a notable scholar is shown by his appointment to a mastership at Eton, and there is no doubt that he would have gone far in the academic career if he had chosen to stay in it. He died on 19th April 1939.

Conscious of course of his privileges of birth, education, and intellectual associations, there was never the slightest sense of superiority; he early espoused the then unpopular cause of Socialism, being one of the first members of the Social Democratic Federation. He dressed as a "no account man" and could never be induced to put on anything special for an occasion. At a time when so many of our unemployed, receiving weekly pay from the Ministry of Labour under the National Insurance Acts were the subject of cheap jibes in our press as "on the dole," he often asserted that he himself was on the dole, the chief source of his income being unearned.

A thoroughly satisfactory occasion was that on which with Salt beside him on the platform, Gandhi related to a large London audience gathered under the auspices of the London Vegetarian Society, how as a young student in London he had been influenced by a book written by Salt to mend his ways in the matter of his diet. It was through another little book edited by Salt that Gandhi first became acquainted with Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience"

which so influenced the great champion of Indian freedom in his resistance movement.

He was a cultured sane and charming man, and so amicable a host as to make those frequent trips from London to Brighton to see Henry Salt even when towards the last months of his life he was ill and frail, among the most cherished of life's memories.

Editor's Note: Mr. John Davies of Caterham, Surrey, England, was one of Henry Salt's closest friends in his last years. We are greatly indebted to him for these reminiscences to add to our series of tributes to Thoreau pioneers.

Since many of you will now undoubtedly want to read more of the books of Henry Salt, I would like to call your attention to a bibliography, "The Books of Henry S. Salt 1887-1937," published by the president of our society, Raymond Adams, at Chapel Hill, N.C., in December, 1937. It lists 65 titles or editions of Salt's books. I would also like to call your attention to A GROUP OF UNPUBLISHED LETTERS BY HENRY S. SALT TO JOSEPH ISHILL, published by Mr. Ishill at the Oriole Press in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, in 1942. This group of forty-one letters from Salt gives a warm insight into his character. Its typography, incidentally, will delight any booklover's heart.

I would like to add here excerpts from two unpublished letters from Henry Salt to Raymond Adams:

I have lately been re-reading my own biography of Thoreau. Much has happened in the forty or fifty years since I wrote; and I should now say that the chief fault of my book was the extreme deference paid in it to the authority of Emerson. The great value of his friendship to the youthful Thoreau is of course not questioned; but I feel that the time has come when the hard fact has got to be faced, without respect to persons, that the author of WALDEN was (in the long run) the greater man of the two.

January 1, 1935

I am still alive, though physically very weak. It is a curious fact that, in intellectual matters, I find myself the young person, as compared with most acquaintances here. They are the "old stagers" some half-century or century later, as regards their views in what relates to ethics or "religion." I suppose they will overtake me in time!

March 1, 1936

A THOREAU HERBARIUM

by Ruth R. Wheeler

Among the treasures kept for fifty years in the Thoreau Museum at Middlesex School in Concord was a set of 75 pressed flowers, ferns, and leaves mounted on paper ranging in size from 8"x 10" to 12" x 17" and marked, "A part of the working Herbarium of Henry D. Thoreau given by Miss Sophia Thoreau after her brother's death to Miss Eliza Hosmer and now presented to the Thoreau Museum of Natural History of Middlesex School by her nephew George S. Hosmer of Detroit Michigan through the kindness of the Misses Jane and Abby Hosmer."

Last summer the museum was dismantled to make room for a new classroom. Mrs. Leslie Anderson and I were asked to look at the Thoreau relics. The school would not sell its holograph letter to Ricketson from H. D. Thoreau, but would sell all but a few of the pressed flowers. The officers of the Thoreau Society were consulted, agreed to buy them, and they are now at Thoreau Farm where each sheet will be put in a plastic envelope and the whole deposited for safe-keeping in the Concord Library.

The authenticity of the collection as far back as Sophia Thoreau is beyond question, and the friendship between the Hosmers and the Thoreaus and between Eliza Hosmer and Sophia Thoreau is a matter of record (Brown, *MEMORIES OF CONCORD*, p. 102). In the collection are a number of sheets of autumn-tinted maple, sumach, and oak leaves arranged in patterns. Sophia Thoreau is known to

have been adept at such arrangements, and one family in Concord still treasures such a chaplet given to them by Sophia.

I should like to think that all the flowers were picked by Henry and brought home to Sophia in the crown of his old hat. We know that was his habit, and that Sophia helped with the pressing and mounting, especially during the last years. If only the sheets had his handwriting or were identified with the time and place of picking! But only eight are named and those in a neat Spenserian hand that could not be Henry's. One of these is "Clintonia Borealis Sleepy Hollow," another "Erythronium Americanum--Roxbury." The only one dated is a leaf arrangement marked "Glen Ellis--Aug. 11, 1870." Disappointing as it was to discover this date, I cannot discard the idea that many of the flowers were indeed brought home by Henry himself. In the first place, I cannot question the good faith of the Hosmer family. Eliza undoubtedly believed them to be Henry's and kept them for that reason. The fact that only one or two were dated may have been an honest attempt to distinguish the ones that were not Henry's. Then, who but Henry would have picked and kept three small lily-pads which show curious tunnels burrowed by insects? Who else would have printed the word "poke" in the juice of the berry to see whether it really made good ink? And Henry's favorite flowers are here, the white clover as well as the rarer orchids; the andromeda and cranberry as well as the walking fern.

A LETTER FROM THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

At the request of our executive committee, our vice-president, Mrs. Wheeler, wrote a letter to the Middlesex County Commissioners complaining about the present condition of Walden Pond and offering the aid of the society in solving the problem. In reply she received the following letter from Mr. Melvin G. Rogers, Chairman of the Middlesex County Commissioners:

August 5, 1949

Dear Mrs. Wheeler:

The Commissioners thank you for your kind letter of July 18, 1949 regarding conditions at the Walden Pond Reservation.

We have been as much concerned about the situation as you have been and as our critics, the letter writers to the Boston Herald, have been. We believe that we have sufficient police and guards, and that plenty of money will be available to us to use for the maintenance of the Reservation--although the Legislature has not as yet approved our budget.

Until the public is more considerate and better educated regarding the disposition of rubbish on public property, we fear that conditions cannot be improved greatly. There are approximately eighty-five acres of land in the Reservation, and it would be impossible to supervise it closely enough, even if we had one thousand employees, so that there would be no rubbish left on some parts of the Reservation during the day. Early each morning we have a crew of caretakers clear up the rubbish in what we believe is a fairly decent fashion. We think there are enough rubbish containers on the parts of the Reservation which receive the larger use, to enable the public to dispose of refuse, if they were but willing to cooperate. However, the disposition of some of the patrons at the Reservation has been such that we have had to chain the rubbish containers to trees in order to prevent their being stolen.

The Legislature this year has authorized us to spend \$25,000 for additional beach accommodations--which will be furnished adjacent to the present beach. It is impractical, however, to build the additional beach until the bathing season is over. When we get these additional facilities completed, it may be that the Commissioners will prohibit the use of the Cove for bathing. At any rate, we will give this matter our careful consideration.

We shall forbid the use of any part of the Reservation to motor vehicles with the exception of the parking area already laid out and hope to be able to prevent damage to any more of the signs. The vandalism which discourages us so much appears to be in evidence in every public park in the country, and it is a puzzle to us how this vandalism can be eradicated. The situation at Walden Pond this year has been particularly trying owing to the fact that many of the beaches in and around Boston have been shut down on account of pollution of the waters, and this action by the Metropolitan authorities has increased the number of patrons at Walden by leaps and bounds.

Respectfully yours,
Melvin G. Rogers.

(Editor's Note: We understand that the county commissioners are buying the property between Route Two and the Reservation so that they can more effectively keep cars out of the cove end.)

THOREAU AND SIR THOMAS BROWNE. . . by J.W. Krutch

I wonder if anyone has ever noted that the famous passage in the last chapter of *WALDEN* where Thoreau advises us to explore ourselves instead of Africa seems to come quite directly from some sentences of Sir Thomas Browne. Speaking of the wonders of the Nile, Browne says: I "have studied to match and parallel those in the more obvious and neglected pieces of Nature, which without further travel I can do in the Cosmography of myself. We carry with us the wonders we seek without us: there is all Africa and her prodigies in us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature, which he that studies wisely learns in a compendium what others labour at in a divided piece and endless volume." --First Part, p.17, Everyman edition.

THREE BRIEF REVIEWS OF THOREAU'S "WEEK"

In the April Bulletin we reprinted George Ripley's *NEW YORK TRIBUNE* review of Thoreau's first book. A number of people wrote in requesting that we reprint the four other reviews of the book that appeared in 1849. We give here three brief ones. The fourth, a much longer review by James Russell Lowell in the *MASSACHUSETTS QUARTERLY REVIEW*, we shall have to leave until another time.

THE ATHENAEUM. October 27, 1849. p. 27. A Week on the Concord and Merrimack [sic] Rivers. By Henry D. Thoreau. --One of Mr. Chapman's importations from the United States. The Concord and Merrimack are not rivers which would be likely to yield much matter of interest to the traveller --even if he sought for it,--which Mr. Thoreau does not. His pages are the record of a week of pic-nic-ing, [sic] and boating--and the vagrant thoughts and fancies to which a man of education and reading habits may give himself up in "hours of idleness." The book would therefore be better described as a series of essays on love, poetry, religion--and so on. The matter is for the most part poor enough; but there are a few things in the volume, scattered here and there, which suggest that the writer is a man with a habit of original thinking, which with more careful culture may produce a richer harvest in some future season. The manner is that of the worst offshoots of Carlyle and Emerson: all Mr. Thoreau's best things are spoilt in the utterance. If he would trust in his own genius, he has that to say which might command a larger audience. but imitations of an imitation! The world is too old and the prophets are too many for such things to have a chance of a public hearing in these days.

GODEY'S LADY'S BOOK, XXXIX (September, 1849), 223. A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. By Henry D. Thoreau. Boston and Cambridge: James Munroe & Co. Those who have read "Margaret Smith's Journal," will be at no loss in settling the

authorship of this clever and interesting work. Mr. Whittier touches all his themes with the true poet's wand; all show forms of beauty and gleams of light that, like the sunbeams on the far-off mountain, make the cold and rugged landscape appear soft and charming. It is just the book to read in the idleness of summer, when wishing to enjoy the pleasures of journeying, without the inconvenience which the actual packing up and going off in hot steamboats and dusty cars occasion. Read it, and see.

PICTORIAL NATIONAL LIBRARY, III (1849), 60-61. Henry D. Thoreau, a young philosopher, whose primitive habits of living have attracted some attention in the vicinity of Concord, has published a volume of 413 pages, entitled A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers. The incidents narrated are those of a cruise down the Concord River to its junction with the Merrimack, up that river to Hookset, and thence on foot to Concord, N.H. The voyage was accomplished in a boat of home manufacture, equipped with oars, sails, &c., and loaded with provisions, cooking utensils, and a tent in which to encamp at night.

We have recently received a letter from Prof. Pettit of the University of Colorado suggesting that camping facilities be established near Walden Pond for those many who travel great distances to visit the cairn. We think it a suggestion well worth considering thoroughly.

The little symposium pamphlet on Thoreau, published in 1946 (reviewed in Bulletin 17), entitled "Thoreau: The Cosmic Yankee," has been reduced in price to 25¢ a copy and is available from Rocker Publications Committee, 2701 S. Atlantic Blvd., Los Angeles 22, Calif.

We are enclosing with this bulletin an imaginative letterhead for Henry Thoreau, designed by Raymond F. Daboll as a paper sample for the Eastern Corporation of Bangor, Me. We are indebted to Monroe W. Gill of the Eastern Corporation for providing us with sufficient copies of this unique bit of Thoreauiana for distribution to all our members.

Prof. Herbert Faulkner West of Hanover, N.H. writes that he has recently given Harvard Library a collection of 110 pamphlets and nearly 140 letters by Edwin B. Hill. (See Bulletin # 28).

John O. Eidson, English Dept., University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, writes: "I am at work on a biography of Charles Stearns Wheeler and would appreciate any information concerning Thoreau-Wheeler connections. Particularly, I should like to know the whereabouts of any letters to or from Wheeler. Also, I should like to have information concerning Wheeler's hut on Flint's Pond and of Thoreau's visit with him there."

ADDITIONS TO THE THOREAU BIBLIOGRAPHY WH Adams, Raymond W. "Chapel Hill Chaff." CHAPEL HILL (N.C.) WEEKLY. July 22, 1949. On neglect of Walden Pond.

Alcott, May. CONCORD SCENES. Illustrated review of Thoreau Society Booklet #6. PROVIDENCE JOURNAL. August 21, 1949. VI, 8.

Carter, George F. "Thoreau, the Great Transcendentalist." HOBBIES, LIV (Aug. 1949), 139-42. Reprinting an essay from the LITERARY COLLECTOR of 1904.

Griscom, Ludlow. BIRDS OF CONCORD. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949. 340pp. \$5.00. In his last years, Thoreau was much concerned with creating an "Atlas of Concord," including a complete record of all the flora and fauna of the region. Mr. Griscom's volume would certainly fulfill the requirements of the bird section of that atlas. Making use of Thoreau's bird notes, those of William Brewster at the turn of the century, and his own today, Mr. Griscom has compiled an impressive picture of Concord ornithology. It will be indispensable to all those who wish to study the reliability of Thoreau's bird records. Yet it is more than a mere scientific exercise. We found it an exceedingly provocative study. We do wish however to cor-

rect two minor factual errors. The famous summerless year (p. 38) was not 1832, but 1812. And the Fitchburg Railroad reached Concord not in 1855 (p. 56), but before Thoreau went out to Walden Pond in 1845.

Hollis, C. Carroll. "Thoreau and the State." COMMONWEAL, L (Sept. 9, 1949), 530-3. "Civil Disobedience" is wrong because it denies the authority of the state.

Jasen, Frank G. "Walden." BOSTON POST MAGAZINE. July 24, 1949. Brief, well-illustrated rhapsody on Walden Pond.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. HENRY DAVID THOREAU. Oehser, Paul H. Review. LIVING WILDERNESS, XIV (Summer 1949), 19-20.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF CURRENT ACQUISITIONS. "Gifts of Mr. Leonard Kebler." VI (May, 1949), 102-105. Includes reproduction of 1p. of MS of a Thoreau college essay on "Whether the Government ought to educate the children of those parents who refuse to do it themselves." Also included in Mr. Kebler's gifts was a first edition of A WEEK.

LOWELL SUN. "Thoreau Society Inducts at Concord." July 11, 1949. Account of annual meeting with photograph of officers of society.

Ludlow, Robert. "Thoreau and the State." COMMONWEAL, L (Sept. 23, 1949), 581-2. A reply to Mr. Hollis, above.

NEW YORK SUN. "Man's Ingratitude to Nature." Aug. 11, 1949. Editorial on neglect of Walden Pond.

Pettigrew, Richard C. "Thoreau." POETRY CHAP-BOOK, VII (Summer, 1949), 89. A poem.

Rooker, Rudolf. PIONEERS OF AMERICAN FREEDOM.

Translated from the German by Arthur E. Briggs. Los Angeles: Rocker Publications Committee, 1949. 215pp. \$3.00. Mr. Rocker devotes more than half a chapter to Thoreau in his study of American liberalism and radicalism, and he declares that "Of all the spiritual representatives of American liberalism, Thoreau was perhaps the most profound and consistent." His discussion of "Civil Disobedience" is a thorough antidote to the Hollis article listed above. The book as a whole is an authoritative study of the liberal tradition in America. The bibliography is particularly helpful for further reading.

Stevens, Agnes F. "On Walden's Condition." BOSTON HERALD. July 7, 1949. One of numerous letters to the editor on the neglect of Walden Pond.

Thoreau, Henry David. "Higher Laws." in THE COLLEGE ANTHOLOGY. Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1949. I, 261-9. Reprint of chapter from WALDEN.

Wallis, Charles L. "Gandhi's Source Book." CHRISTIAN REGISTER, CXXVIII (Sept. 1949), 31-2. On influence of "Civil Disobedience."

We are indebted to the following for information used in this bulletin: R. Adams, H. Adel, L. Chirin, R. Currier, M. Doolittle, K. Harber, C. Hoagland, L. Lehrman, L. Litchfield, A. Lownes, P. Oehser, F. Piper, R. Robbins, P. Sargent, E. Teale, J. Wade, R. Wheeler, and W. White. Please let the secretary know of any Thoreauiana he has missed and new items as they appear.

The Thoreau Society is an informal organization of several hundred students and followers of the life and works of Henry David Thoreau. Membership is open to anyone interested. Fees are one dollar a year; life membership, twenty-five dollars. This bulletin is issued quarterly by the secretary. All material, unless otherwise assigned, is compiled and written by the secretary.

The officers of the society are Raymond Adams, Chapel Hill, N.C., president; Mrs. Caleb Wheeler, Concord, Mass., vice-president; and secretary-treasurer:

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